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SIPDIS

NSC FOR MPHEE, PVROOMAN, OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2019

TAGS: PREL MOPS PINR PTER SY IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQ POLICE STRENGTHENING ALONG SYRIAN BORDER

Classified By: Classified by PMA MC C. Munter: Reasons 1.4 a & d

¶1. (C) Summary: Post is closely following Iraqi and international media reports of Iraqi police and security force deployments to its border with Syria, particularly along the common border with the Iraqi Anbar province. Reports and contacts involving Iraqi MoI and MoD sources so far indicate no evidence of actual force augmentations along the border. There does, however, appear to be high-ranking intent, including from PM Maliki, to be seen by Damascus as well as the Iraqi public as taking action as the GOI makes its case that Syria was behind the August 19 bombings. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Post inquiries with MoI sources reveal that senior Iraqi MoI officials participated in an Iraqi cabinet discussion two days ago wherein significant cabinet discussions dwelled on the past political effectiveness vis--vis Turkey in being seen as deploying "large numbers of forces" to their common border to extract the extradition of a figure Baghdad wished returned to Iraqi control. MoD contacts report there have been no troop augmentation so far to the Iraqi-Syrian border. MoI contacts with MNF-I in the last 24 hours indicate heightened anxiety about foreign, particularly Baathist, alleged fifth column activity and "sleeper cells," especially in perceived Baathist provincial strongholds, such as Salah ad Din province. MNF-I noted this information was presented to them in a meeting format which typically does not feature this sort of proffered "intelligence" and could have been intended to influence as much as inform U.S. participants.

¶3. (S) Comment: PM Maliki asserted publicly that "Baathists" harbored by Syria were behind the August 19 bombings and has been taking successive steps to increase pressure on Damascus along these lines in recent days, such as recalling the Iraqi ambassador and calling for an United Nations investigation into the bombings. It is plausible that these reports of Iraqi deployments to the border are another part of his campaign to lean on Damascus to bolster his anti-Baathist domestic credentials for pre-election political gain. End Comment.

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